

Brier Warbler

Woudlangstertjie

Oreophilais robertsi

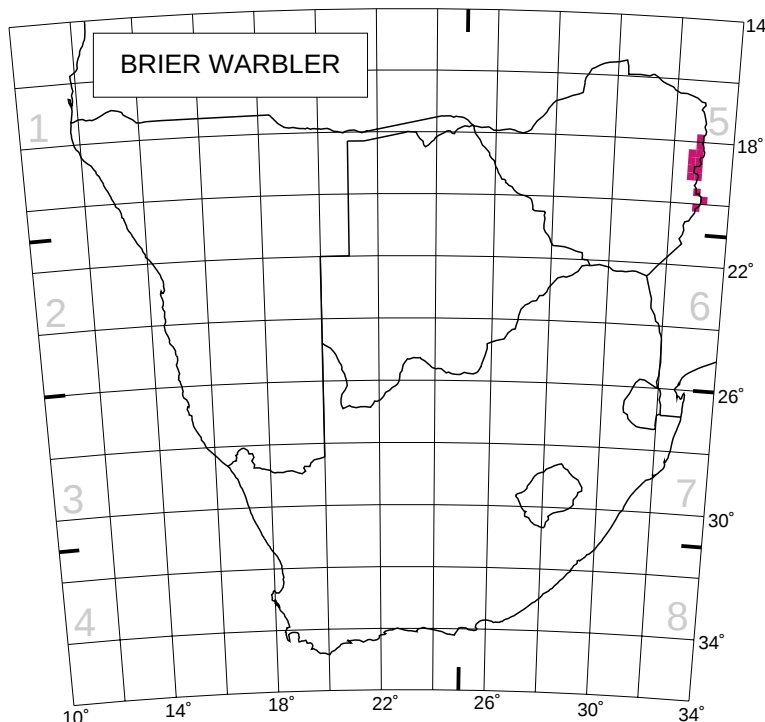
The Brier Warbler, formerly known as Roberts's Prinia, was first found at Mount Selinda (2032BC) in eastern Zimbabwe in 1906 by Swynnerton, but not recognized as a distinct species until 40 years later when it was formally described by Benson (1946). From Mount Selinda it ranges north to Nyanga (1832BA); it is endemic to eastern Zimbabwe and does not occur on Gorongosa Mountain in Mozambique (Clancey 1971c).

It is a rather nondescript brown bird but has a long, untidy tail with only eight feathers, unlike other prinias in which the number of tail feathers is 10 (Maclean 1993b). It is surprising that, prior to its recognition as a distinct species, it was considered conspecific with the Tawnyflanked Prinia *Prinia subflava*. In colour it is much browner, its plumage, especially its tail, appears rather straggly and untidy, and the chattering call is distinctive.

Gregarious and noisy, its presence is revealed by its chattering. It inhabits rank growth on the edges of montane forest, bracken-briar and particularly *Philippia* spp. heath, but also occurs in open scrub areas at some distance from the forest and in small clearings inside the forest (Manson & Manson 1980; Irwin 1981; Maclean 1993b). It is common above 1400 m, but occurs down to 1200 m in the southern part of the range (Irwin 1981).

It is sedentary, with most ringed birds showing no movements (Manson & Manson 1980), but a ringed bird has been recaptured 5 km away from where it was ringed. Breeding has been recorded in the wet season, September–February (Irwin 1981). When not breeding, it goes about in parties of 8–10 birds which keep in contact by constant chattering.

It generally replaces the Tawnyflanked Prinia altitudinally and, where they overlap, habitat preference is different, with Brier Warbler keeping to denser cover (Irwin 1981). It is common within its restricted range and is not currently threatened.



Recorded in 13 grid cells, 0.3%
Total number of records: 225
Mean reporting rate for range: 27.9%

R.M. Harwin

